

# IMPROVING THE NATO-EU PARTNERSHIP: A TURKISH PERSPECTIVE

*As recent events in Georgia demonstrate, the Euro-Atlantic security environment remains complex and subject to unforeseeable developments. Ongoing operations in Afghanistan and Kosovo as well as possible future crises put a premium on close cooperation between NATO and the EU. Yet, relations between the two organizations have been stymied from the beginning by political and institutional tensions, including those raised by the admission of the Greek Cypriots into the EU and those concerning the participation of non-EU allies such as Turkey in ESDP. Institutional flexibility on the part of the EU could help resolve these obstacles and create greater synergy between NATO and the EU.*

**İhsan Kızıltan\***



\*İhsan Kızıltan is a Counselor at the Embassy of Turkey in Washington DC. The views expressed not necessarily represent those of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

**T**he overarching problems encountered in NATO-EU relations have traditionally been attributed, depending on the narrative, to France, the U.S. and/or institutional rivalry. The U.S. and France are generally depicted as the main protagonists, championing their own agendas and thus interfering in the otherwise smooth flow of transatlantic cooperation. These major topics will rightly continue to receive much attention. This article will leave these issues aside and focus on the problems encountered in NATO-EU relations from Turkey's perspective and how the EU can contribute to improving these relations.

The role of Turkey in European security is commonly associated with its long-standing NATO membership, the capabilities of its armed forces or its role as a frontline state in the face of new risks and regional instability. The often forgotten part of this equation is Turkey's involvement in the EU's European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), an increasingly important component of the western security architecture alongside the Atlantic Alliance. A related issue, Turkey's position with regard to NATO-EU cooperation, is also not well known and is often misunderstood.

The details of NATO-EU relations are dismissed by some as "theology". The issue is perhaps too quickly reduced to the misleading shorthand description that Turkey is simply "blocking" cooperation between the two organizations. Turkey, the claim goes, is doing this, either to gain leverage in its bid for EU membership or to punish the EU for granting membership to the Greek Cypriots.

In fact, the mismatch between the compositions of these two organizations<sup>1</sup> and the question of how to involve non-EU allies in ESDP (referred to as "the participation issue" in NATO jargon) has affected relations from the start. As with any multifaceted international matter, there is more than one national or institutional agenda at stake. From the Turkish perspective, the claim that it is blocking NATO-EU cooperation is a lop-sided accusation.

While there are no easy solutions, establishing enhanced cooperation between NATO and the EU would benefit the whole transatlantic community, including the U.S. and Canada in numerous ways.

### *Evolution of the NATO-EU Framework for Cooperation and Turkey*

The European Security and Defense Identity –the notion of building a European pillar within the Alliance– was already accepted by NATO in the 1990s. The

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<sup>1</sup> 21 of the 26 NATO allies are at the same time members of the EU. Currently, the U.S., Norway, Iceland, Canada and Turkey are not in the EU. Albania and Croatia will soon become full-fledge members of the Alliance, but remain outside the EU for the time-being. All except for 6 members of the 27 EU countries are NATO allies.

NATO Foreign Ministers decided in Berlin on 3 June, 1996, to make Alliance assets available for Western European Union (WEU)-led crisis management operations, leading to the birth of the phrase “Berlin plus” operations.

After the St. Malo agreement between France and the UK in 1998, the EU began to acquire the institutional appendages necessary to transform an emerging EU policy into an operational instrument. The slow but steady process of building up ESDP has continued ever since, in step with the EU’s political and institutional fortunes. However, from the Turkish perspective, the gradual construction of ESDP, in the absence of remedial measures, has had the net effect of pushing Turkey further away from the core of European security cooperation. As European countries drew closer in the defense realm, Turkey found itself nudged away.

A key turning point came at the Washington Summit of 1999, when the Alliance gave its blessing to ESDP. Paragraphs eight, nine and ten of the Summit Communiqué<sup>2</sup> deal with NATO-EU relations: The first of these paragraphs sets the background to NATO-EU relations; the second establishes certain principles in this regard; and the last provides taskings on the adoption of the necessary arrangements for access by the EU to the collective assets and capabilities of the Alliance. Turkey attached particular importance to paragraph 10.d which reads:

“We attach utmost importance to ensuring the fullest possible involvement of non-EU European Allies in the EU-led crisis response operations, *building on existing consultation arrangements within the WEU.*”

Subsequently, at the Nice European Council held in December 2000, the EU set out the arrangements regarding the involvement in ESDP of non-EU European members (at the time Norway, Iceland, and Turkey) and candidates for accession to the EU, as well as the standing arrangements for consultations and cooperation between the EU and NATO.

However, the practical details of these arrangements for the involvement of non-EU European allies in ESDP had to be elaborated in a further round of discussion. This process required intensive negotiations between the main national actors, namely the UK, U.S., Greece and Turkey as well as the EU and NATO staffs, and could be considered a textbook case of diplomatic compromise. Referred to initially as the “Ankara”, then the “Brussels” document, eventually what became known as the “Nice implementation document,” was approved at the Brussels European Council on 24-25 December 2002.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1999/p99-064e.htm>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/)

The Nice implementation document describes the modalities for cooperation with non-EU European allies in peace-time consultations and in the conduct of exercises and operations, all in the context of ESDP. From the Turkish perspective, its application has unfortunately not lived up to expectations as a major breakthrough in relations with the EU. The EU has either applied it in a perfunctory manner or essentially ignored it. For example, not even symbolic consultations were held with Turkey when “EUJUST LEX” was launched in Iraq or “EUJUST Themis” in Georgia, as would have been possible under the provision of this document regarding EU operations conducted in geographic proximity of non-EU allies or that may affect their national security interests.

The details of the strategic cooperation between NATO and the EU continued to be hammered out from 1999 to 2003. In addition to the work on the establishment of the modalities for the participation of non-EU European allies in ESDP, the conditions under which the EU could resort to the use of NATO assets and capabilities (the “Berlin plus” arrangements) in crisis management operations were also completed. Practical matters such as an agreement on the security of information between the EU and NATO, as well as the means of cooperation between the two organizations in the field of capability development (i.e. the creation of the NATO-EU Capabilities Group) were also concluded.

In these discussions, Turkey and other non-EU allies strove for a fundamental balance between NATO support for ESDP and the involvement of non-EU European Allies in ESDP. As such, at the end there emerged mutual responsibilities for both sides.

The successful conclusions of these discussions were announced in the “EU-NATO Declaration on ESDP” dated 16 December 2002.<sup>4</sup> The Declaration enumerated the principles on which the relationship was founded and stated, inter alia, that:

*“The EU and NATO,*

*Welcome the strategic partnership established between the EU and NATO in crisis management, founded on our shared values, the indivisibility of our security and our determination to tackle the challenges of the new Century;*

*...*

*To this end:*

*The European Union is ensuring the fullest possible involvement of non-EU members of NATO within ESDP, implementing the relevant Nice arrangements,*

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<sup>4</sup> NATO Press Release (2002) 142, 16 December 2002.

*as set out in the letter from the EU High Representative on 13 December 2002; NATO is supporting ESDP in accordance with the relevant Washington Summit decisions, and is giving the European Union, inter alia and in particular, assured access to NATO's planning capabilities, as set out in the NAC decisions on 13 December 2002;*

*Both organizations have recognized the need for arrangements to ensure the coherent, transparent and mutually reinforcing development of the capability requirements common to the two organizations, with a spirit of openness.”*

Despite these agreements, relations between NATO and the EU did not grow warmer or closer as hoped. The stagnant trend in ties can be illustrated by the decline in the interaction between the two organizations: NATO and the WEU were able to conduct a joint crisis management exercise in 2000; likewise, NATO and the EU held their first such exercise in November 2003. Yet by 2007, after the EU's enlargement including, inter alia, the accession of the Greek Cypriots, the dispute over the modalities of NATO-EU cooperation would hinder holding the planned annual exercise.

Over the years NATO has arguably taken a much more open and eager stance on working with the EU. As anecdotal evidence, this seems to be reflected in the number and significance of references made to the EU and to NATO-EU cooperation in NATO declarations and documents. Also EU officials are regularly invited to attend more NATO events than vice versa.

Furthermore, NATO seems to be more adept at transforming its structures and practices to bring force-contributing partners closer to the Alliance. In this regard, the requests by EU Partners of NATO (Sweden, Finland, Austria and Ireland) for deeper consultations with the Alliance mirror the wish for closer involvement in ESDP on the part of Allies who are not in the EU. NATO, perhaps reflecting more self-confidence in its mission, has arguably been more sympathetic and open toward its partners than the EU, which still seems to be experiencing growing pains in this regard.

### ***EU Enlargement and NATO***

NATO-EU relations have in particular been dogged before and since 2004 by the accession of the Greek Cypriots to the EU. How to handle the anticipated admission of the Greek Cypriots into the EU was a major sticking point during the discussions between NATO and the EU. The EU's enlargement officially imported the Cyprus problem into the equation.

An agreement on the UN plan submitted to both sides on the island in 2004 would have resolved the Cyprus issue and allowed the UN troops first stationed on the island in 1964 to finally withdraw. This was the expectation of the international community and in particular of the EU. When the UN plan was accepted by the Turkish Cypriots, but rejected by the Greek Cypriot side in separate referenda, these hopes sunk and the EU found itself in a conundrum. Nevertheless, the Greek Cypriot Administration was admitted into the EU just days later.

Interestingly, if the UN plan had been accepted by the two sides in 2004, the newly created state on the Island would have had essentially a demilitarized status, thus presumably allowing limited participation in ESDP in any case.

Since 2004, the essential parameters of the Cyprus problem have remained frozen. As such, Turkey has been clearly and consistently against the inclusion in NATO-EU relations of the Greek Cypriot Administration, which it does not recognize as representing the whole island.

It is worth noting that the political issues underlying the mutually agreed framework for strategic cooperation between NATO and the EU were well known by all the actors when they were approved in 2003 during the Greek Presidency of the EU. These arrangements are binding not only on NATO, but also constitute part of the EU body of agreed positions and decisions – the *acquis*. New members joining the EU are, therefore, naturally required to abide by them. Not entirely surprisingly, this has not been the case.

In retrospect, a firm insistence on the need to respect the agreed arrangements by all new members of the EU, including the Greek Cypriots, would have preempted many of the aggravations soon to be encountered in NATO-EU strategic cooperation. This and the earlier rejection of the UN peace plan should rank as two missed opportunities.

The framework for NATO-EU strategic cooperation deliberately had built in certain conditions (membership in Partnership for Peace, requirement for a security agreement between NATO and the country in question) for participation in this cooperation in the hope of preventing the very problems that would later be created by the admission of the Greek Cypriots into the EU. Thus, these conditions are not the source, but the symptoms of the problem.

In any case, regardless of different interpretations, the modalities of NATO-EU strategic cooperation affect only the Maltese and the Greek Cypriots. Malta, which had withdrawn from NATO's Partnership for Peace program in the 1990s, announced at NATO's Bucharest Summit in April of this year, that it would

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rejoin the program. Following the re-activation of its existing security agreement with NATO, Malta should become eligible to participate in NATO-EU strategic cooperation.

### ***NATO-EU Strategic Cooperation***

A major source of disagreement is the actual scope of NATO-EU relations. The decisions taken in December 2002 on the EU side did not match those made in the Alliance. These discrepancies between the decisions taken by the two organizations constitute the crux of the dispute.

Turkey holds the view that NATO-EU strategic cooperation, in accordance with the letter and spirit of the agreed framework, covers all aspects of ties between NATO and the EU. It believes that synergy between the two organizations requires broad engagement on all issues of common interest and should not be reduced exclusively to NATO military support to the EU in crisis management operations. In this context, Turkey supports NATO-EU engagement but emphasizes the need for the agreed framework to be applied consistently on all facets of NATO-EU cooperation.

The EU has a narrower definition of the scope of NATO-EU cooperation. Regarding the participation of EU members in NATO-EU cooperation, the EU insists that this can be restricted only in cases when the “Berlin plus” arrangements are employed. In other words, the EU believes that all EU members, including the Greek Cypriots must participate in all other avenues of interaction between NATO and the EU.

At the moment, as a result of the EU’s obstinacy on this point, formal meetings between the North Atlantic Council and the EU’s Political and Security Committee (i.e. without the participation of the Greek Cypriot and Maltese representatives) are essentially limited to a single item only – the conduct of Operation “Althea” in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which is a “Berlin Plus” operation. The EU insists that other topics can be dealt with at NAC-PSC meetings only in the presence of the Greek Cypriots and Malta.

Proposals put forward at various times by Turkey and other allies to informally discuss issues such as terrorism, Darfur and even hurricane Katrina have thus not been accepted. This position can be attributed partly to the EU’s wish to have all members represented at the table and partly to the desire of some EU countries to limit the NATO-EU agenda to crisis management issues only.

The Cyprus problem has also had detrimental operational effects on NATO-EU relations. By reinforcing institutional rigidity within the EU, it has led to the launching of the ESDP mission in Afghanistan without a general agreement for support from NATO. The same is the case for the EU's EULEX mission in Kosovo. In effect, the EU has made a political decision to forsake the benefits of NATO cooperation and support on the ground for the purpose of preserving institutional solidarity in Brussels.

EU solidarity, while no doubt a worthy cause in its own right, appears to be self-defeating when used as a pretext for furthering national political ambitions. Both institutional rigidity and misguided solidarity apparently can create dilemmas in the wider geopolitical context.

Much has been made about the lack of dialogue, primarily at the political level, between NATO and the EU over Kosovo and Afghanistan. In fact, developments in Kosovo thus far show that the more pressing problem has been establishing better coordination between the EU and the UN in order to ensure a smooth transfer of responsibility between these two organizations. Similarly, enhancing NATO's cooperation with the UN has admittedly proven at least as important as its ties with the EU.

Ironically, the "Berlin plus" arrangements already provide tested means that could have been employed in Kosovo and Afghanistan, rather than resorting to ad hoc arrangements in each individual theatre where NATO and the EU are both operating simultaneously. This would have allowed them to work together rather than side by side. While staff level contacts in Brussels and in the field enable the necessary day-to-day coordination to take place, dialogue at the political level is a priori restricted by EU's well-known insistence on the presence of all its members in meetings between the two organizations.

The Alliance's work on the development of a comprehensive approach among all actors in operations has also been affected by the disagreement over whether the agreed framework of NATO-EU relations is relevant or not. For its part, Turkey has been a supporter of this concept from the outset. Yet, it was quickly accused of blocking progress when, faced with attempts to bypass the NATO-EU agreed arrangements, it insisted on the confirmation of the relevance of the agreed framework to the concept.

The notion that the EU could conduct business without the presence in the meeting rooms in Brussels or within the deployments in the field, of every one of its members is not as outrageous as it might seem at first glance. Operations "Althea" and earlier Operation "Concordia" in Macedonia, conducted in

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accordance with the Berlin plus arrangements already set viable precedents. Moreover, the EU acts in variable geometry in various functional areas such as the Eurozone and the Schengen arrangements. “Permanent structured cooperation” involving smaller groups of members acting together is becoming part of EU practices. News reports suggest that France is working on plans to create an elite defense group of six member states.<sup>5</sup> Finally, there is also the case of Denmark’s voluntary opt out from ESDP.

### ***Turkey and ESDP***

Turkey originally had an associate partnership status in the Western European Union (WEU), which could be described as the institutional precursor to ESDP. This status allowed it, as a non-EU partner to take part, de facto, in practically all WEU activities and at a minimum entailed a say in decision-shaping as well as a sense of belonging in the club. Exclusion from meetings and decisions was more the exception and participation was close to being the rule. While this status fell far short of its desire for full membership, Turkey had at least the opportunity to make its voice heard.

When the WEU was replaced by ESDP as the EU’s operational arm, Turkey lost its status as an associate member and this accumulation of practices. Returning to square one meant that certain debates would episodically have to be rehashed. Furthermore, when the activities of the West European Armaments Group were folded by the consent of its members, including Turkey, into the newly formed European Defense Agency (EDA), even the status of full membership in this group would prove insufficient to allow Turkey to have a seat at the EDA decision-making table.

The European Defense Agency is the nascent centerpiece for European defense industry cooperation. Norway, another non-EU European ally, has already established cooperative relations with this Agency. Excluding Turkey from the defense sector, in which it can potentially be an important customer and supplier, will not benefit any party.

Despite such setbacks, the Turkish position from the very beginning with regard to ESDI, and later ESDP, as well as the development of NATO-EU relations has been and continues to be fully supportive. In fact, Turkey has contributed with personnel and equipment to eight ESDP missions so far, ranging from Operation “Althea” to Operation “RD Congo” in Africa. Turkey has offered to contribute to other missions as well. On the other hand, of 12 ongoing ESDP missions and operations, seven are in Turkey’s neighborhood.

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<sup>5</sup> Simon Taylor, “Sarkozy plots defense force with big EU states”, *European Voice*, 14 February 2008.

Turkey had also until mid-2007, declared a reinforced brigade to the EU's force planning target – the Helsinki Headline Goal 2010. It is still participating in the EU's Battle Groups initiative by taking part in an Italian-led battle group. All these force contributions and commitments represent a desire to contribute to assist international efforts in regional crises, which in some cases could affect its national security, and to take part in European defense structures.

Moreover, being a member of one of these organizations and a country negotiating for accession to the other, Turkey strongly feels, located as it is in a difficult geography, that it is a matter of national interest to support closer relations between NATO and the EU in accordance with the agreed modalities.

In this light, suggestions that Turkey is opposed to closer NATO ties with the EU as a way of punishing the latter for letting in the Greek Cypriots or for dragging its feet on Turkey's own accession process are misleading. In the first instance, the framework for cooperation between the two organizations took into account the planned EU enlargement of 2004. The Turkish expectation on this score was and remains simply that the EU act within the agreed framework. As for the second notion, it is obvious that membership in the EU encompasses much more than the fields of defense and security. How blocking NATO-EU cooperation could further Turkey's own EU accession process is not clear.

It will be difficult to goad the EU into living up to the agreed arrangements. A necessary first step, in the Turkish view, would be the implementation of the Nice arrangements for the participation of non-EU European allies in ESDP in a consistent and meaningful manner. More consultations and collaboration between the EU and Turkey within the context of decision-shaping in ESDP can only benefit Euro-Atlantic security.

The cold shoulder from the EU on involvement in ESDP is compounded by vetoes from certain EU members of two agreements on cooperation between Turkey and the EU. In addition to the agreement on cooperation between Turkey and the European Defense Agency, an agreement on the exchange of classified information between Turkey and the EU also remains stalled. The blockage on the agreement regarding classified information is hampering not only Turkish-ESDP ties, but also relations between Turkey and the EU in general, including in scientific and technological cooperation.

In both these cases, the EU approval process has been blocked despite previous EU decisions to conclude these agreements with Turkey.<sup>6</sup> Failure to meet its

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<sup>6</sup> According to EU's "Joint Action", dated 12 July 2004, establishing the European Defence Agency, a cooperative relationship is foreseen with non-EU WEAG members. [http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2004/l\\_245/l\\_24520040717en00170028.pdf](http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2004/l_245/l_24520040717en00170028.pdf). The security agreement is a general requirement for countries cooperating with the EU.

obligations does not help the EU's credibility in the ongoing debate.

Talks with the EU Council Secretariat in order to explore means allowing Turkey to have a meaningful voice in ESDP, in accordance with the Nice implementation document, have thus far not been fruitful, as political limits imposed on the EU staff seem to leave them with little room for maneuver.

Collectively these developments have led to a palpable sense of disappointment with the EU among Turkish civilian and military authorities. The enthusiasm felt in Turkey for the European defense project seems to be fading. These sentiments have moved Turkey to voice its concerns louder and to withdraw its force declaration to the Helsinki Headline Goal. Whether it will stay in the EU's Battle Groups initiative remains to be seen.

### *Squaring the Circle*

The principle of the "indivisibility of security" has served and continues to serve European security and stability well. Since the end of the Cold War this principle and the pursuit of a "Europe whole and free" have brought greater peace and harmony to European nations than previously ever possible in history.

But the European security architecture is more than just ESDP or NATO. There is a web of bilateral and multilateral ties, which include the OSCE, Russia and a number of other countries, as well as the U.S.-EU relationship. In this context, a truly comprehensive approach to security in Europe will require forward thinking, flexibility and innovative approaches from the EU, as a leading and ambitious voice on security in Europe, especially with regard to its relations with the Alliance.

NATO-EU relations are the essential lynchpin of European security arrangements. However, these are beset by twin dilemmas: the EU wishes to demonstrate operational presence and political unity on the world stage, but is hampered by its own institutional practices and membership. Turkey, on the other hand, desires enhanced NATO-EU ties and to the extent possible, a meaningful role in ESDP, but finds these roads blocked. It will be a loss for both the EU and Turkey if this downward spiral in relations continues, as defense and security is an area where enhanced cooperation would have great promise.

And yet the picture with regard to possible positive developments is not all gloomy. France has set ambitious goals for its EU Presidency and has also announced its intention to participate fully in the Alliance. These aims will hopefully include a fresh and constructive approach to NATO-EU strategic cooperation. France is one of the countries best versed in the intricacies of NATO-EU relations and

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ESDP. If it can bring its accumulated knowledge to bear in a sincere manner, therein lies a chance of creating a win-win situation for all sides. For example, the new EU mission in Georgia (EUMM) launched in October of this year could still provide an opportunity to start energizing this relationship.

A second positive sign is the start in September 2008 of negotiations between the two parties on the island of Cyprus. These may eventually lead to a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus issue. Until there is a comprehensive settlement on the island, it appears inevitable that the Cyprus issue will continue to have ramifications on NATO-EU relations.

Should progress prove possible in these two areas, then the NATO Summit scheduled for 2009 and the planned revision of the Strategic Concept of the Alliance would respectively present the ideal setting and opportunity to declare and codify a new chapter in NATO-EU relations.